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## Cover page

### Article title

## **Gender and the ‘Masquerade’ in James Joyce, Joan Riviere and Marlene Dietrich, 1925-30**

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### Abstract

My article, which begins by noting the fluke meeting between writer James Joyce and film star Marlene Dietrich in a Paris restaurant, considers the importance of masquerade and gender performativity in three texts of the late 1920s: an extract from Joyce’s final novel, *Finnegans Wake*, first published in 1925; Dietrich’s film, *The Blue Angel* (1930); and Joan Riviere’s psychoanalytic essay, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’ (1929). After critically assessing the term ‘masquerade’ and Riviere’s reflections on it, I discuss the significance of Dietrich’s self-made costumes for *The Blue Angel*, arguing that she recognises the playful potential of the masquerade. Following this, I discuss the gender performativity of ALP, the heroine of *Finnegans Wake*, noting that her chapter of the novel shares with Dietrich’s and Riviere’s texts an emphasis on gender instability, and shows how this can be performed through fashionable dress. I end by noting that Joyce, a male modernist often

criticized for his reductive representations of women, is highly sensitive to the relationship between fashion and gender at this point in time.

### Keywords

Joyce

Dietrich

Riviere

femininity

masquerade

performance

### Biography

Helen Saunders is a PhD student at King's College London, researching the representation of fashion in the work of James Joyce. She is a postgraduate representative on the Executive Council of the British Association of Modernist Studies, an administrator at the Centre for Modern Literature & Culture at King's, and has published in *James Joyce Broadsheet* and *Irish Studies Review*.

## Gender and the 'Masquerade' in James Joyce, Joan Riviere and Marlene Dietrich, 1925-30

In the early 1930s, Nora Barnacle, the wife of modernist author and unwilling celebrity James Joyce, spotted 'a blonde, rather tired-looking woman, without make-up, in a black suit' sitting across the restaurant from her, her husband and their friends (Colum, 1959: 229). It was Marlene Dietrich. While Nora and James could be a reserved and diffident couple, on this occasion Joyce took the opportunity to speak to the star. Mary Colum, a friend dining with the Joyces that evening, later noted that the atmosphere during their conversation was 'electrical' (Colum 1959: 229). She records that 'both Miss Dietrich and, more naturally, the novelist with her [Erich Maria Remarque, author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*] were excited at the encounter and were loath to leave when their table was announced' (Colum 1959: 229). Joyce told the star how much he had enjoyed *The Blue Angel* (1930), to which Dietrich replied, 'Then, monsieur, you saw the best of me' (Colum 1959: 229).<sup>1</sup> During the 1930s, Joyce was having a difficult time. He was struggling with finishing *Finnegans Wake* and dealing with the severe illness of his daughter Lucia. Nonetheless, this meeting buoyed him: after it, he commented, 'I thought the years when I was a lion were over' (Colum 1959: 229). Joyce was a keen cinemagoer and was evidently a fan of Dietrich's; there is one uncontested allusion to Dietrich already in *Finnegans Wake*, to her 1928 film *Prinzessin Olala* ('Your olala is in the region of sahuls', Joyce 1939: 26.13).<sup>2</sup> There are also several allusions to 'Lola', the heroine of *The Blue Angel* (FW 250.19, 434.23, 525.14). At the same time that Joyce was watching Dietrich's films, the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere published an essay in which she discussed the concept of masquerade and its relationship to gender: in this article, I note the near-simultaneous recognition in the late 1920s, across three fields of inquiry – film, literature and psychoanalysis – of the importance of masquerade within women's dress and self-fashioning.

The exact definition of 'masquerade' has been disputed by scholars. In her study of performances of femininity in the 1920s, Liz Conor discusses the fluidity of the term: does it suggest that an identity, ready at any moment to be unmasked, is hidden by a performance, or does

it mean that there is no identity without performance? (Conor 2005: 5). Conor answers this question by claiming that in the visual sphere, identity is created through the repetition of particular visual acts (Conor 2005: 6). Conor's delineation of 'masquerade' is a productive one, though Joan Riviere, a psychoanalyst contemporary with Joyce and Dietrich, provides another suggestion. While Dietrich was recording *The Blue Angel*, Riviere (incidentally, a former dressmaker) published 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929). Its central tenet is that 'women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men' (Riviere 1986: 35). Preempting Conor and Judith Butler, Riviere notes that 'masquerade' and 'womanliness' are synonyms: 'whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing' (Riviere 1986: 38).

In his analysis of Riviere's thesis, Stephen Heath discusses her case study of the university lecturer who dresses in particularly feminine ways in front of her colleagues to prevent the perception forming that she is manly (Riviere 1986: 37). Heath argues that Riviere's lecturer 'puts on a show of femininity they demand but inappropriately, keeping her distance, and returns masculinity to them as equally unreal, another act, a charade of power' (Heath 1986: 56). Heath is keen to contextualize Riviere's argument within the cinema of the period, because 'Hollywood know[s] the difficulties of the masquerade and genuine womanliness, the problematic of who *she* is' (original emphasis, Heath 1986: 57). To illustrate his point that masquerade finds its expression above all in cinema, he cites Dietrich's outfit in *The Blue Angel* (but conspicuously does not record its contemporaneity with Riviere), noting that she

wears all the accouterments of femininity *as* accouterments, does the poses as poses, gives the act as an act (as in so many films, she is a cabaret performer) [...] Dietrich gives the masquerade in excess and so *proffers* the masquerade, take it or leave it, holding and flaunting the male gaze [...] remember the bric-à-brac of male attire that Dietrich affects in her most famous poses - top hat, dress jacket, cane. (original emphases, Heath 1986: 56-7)

As Heath suggests, Dietrich was known as much for her wardrobe as for her acting. Her signature outfit was a man's tailored jacket and trousers, styled by Travis Banton, head of costume at Paramount, and it was this look that helped her establish her position as a style icon: 'by 1926 women stars had been sporting them in public, but a woman in a man's suit was still *outré* [...] by 1933, women would be wearing men's suits openly, in imitation of the Dietrich trend' (original emphasis, Stutesman 2005: 35-6). Recall that she was wearing a suit when Joyce met her in the restaurant, an aspect of the evening notable enough that Mary Colum was able to recall nearly thirty years later in her memoir.

Dietrich plays with masquerade throughout *The Blue Angel*. After deriding director Josef von Sternberg's original costumes as 'stupid - uninteresting, boring - nothing to catch the eye. Blank! Bo-o-o-oring!', her husband asked von Sternberg if she might make her own ('Try it - see what she comes up with. Let her put it together'), a request that was soon approved (Riva 1992: 65-7). Dietrich's inspiration for Lola's look came from a Berlin 'transvestite' Dietrich knew, who originally wore the top hat and garter (Kosta: 2009: 92): her image in the film marks a reflection of a contemporary gender play already in existence in the film's wider culture

Throughout the film, Lola displays her self-consciousness of her performances *as* performances: in brazenly changing her clothes *outside* her cubicle and applying make-up in full view of those who pass through the dressing room, she delights, as Heath suggests, in the masquerade *as* masquerade, exposing its own operations. Coincidentally, Dietrich's film aligns with Riviere's theory in another way too: though Lola is not Riviere's 'intellectual woman', she nonetheless performs femininity for a Professor (Rath teaches literature in a gymnasium), one of the roles Riviere suggests the woman, as performer of the masquerade, is especially self-conscious around due to the risk of the performance being exposed as one. With him for the first time in neither stage garb nor dressing gown, Lola wears a distinctly Chanel-esque skirt suit. Chanel, radically, included masculine tailoring as a key aspect of her womenswear brand: the outfit, then, contributes, using a contemporary fashion twist, to the destabilization of gender categories that

Dietrich maintained throughout her career. Yet in *The Blue Angel*, her undergarments are perhaps the items that the audience and Professor Rath see the most often. They establish the plot – he ventures back to the club to return them, with dire consequences – and are irrevocably bound up with his desire for her as something frilly, frolicsome and feminine. When Dietrich-as-Lola wears her drawers under her translucent hoop dress, she again exposes her own masquerade: even when we ‘see through’ the feminine prop of her hoopskirt, we are met with another sartorial performance of femininity, in the form of frilly undergarments. The masquerade, for Dietrich, is self-conscious, playful, made of many layers and resistant to the search for an ‘end point’: consistent with Riviere’s argument, Dietrich’s outfit collapses the distinction between womanliness and masquerade.

As well as in Dietrich’s work, Riviere’s concept of masquerade is also in evidence in *Finnegans Wake*. The *Wake*’s main female character is ALP, short for Anna Livia Plurabelle, a personified version of the Liffey, the river that runs through Dublin. The novel was released in parts before being published as a whole in 1939; ALP’s episode was written in 1923 and first published in 1925. In the 1939 edition, ALP’s chapter is the eighth and final part of the first book, of four books. This chapter was especially important to Joyce: he ‘lavished even more than his usual generous measure of attention’ on it, spending 1,200 hours on revisions and singling it out four times for separate publication in a range of journals and periodicals’ (McCarthy 2005: 163). In this chapter, ALP’s toilet and clothes are described at length by two washerwomen, who note that she makes ‘herself tidal to join in the mascarete’ (FW 206.14). In his descriptions of ALP’s clothes, Joyce, as we have seen Dietrich do, introduces the concept of masquerade and acknowledges how masculinity and femininity are performances aided by sartorial and cosmetic props.<sup>3</sup>

ALP initially appears as hyper feminine. Joyce describes her ‘frostifying tresses dasht with virevlies’ (FW 119.36) and mentions her Marcelle wave, a highly fashionable style in 1920s Paris (‘was she marcellewaved or was it weirdly a wig she wore’, FW 204.23). Her clothing comprises traditionally feminine items including a ‘fishnetzeveil’; ‘band of gorse for an arnoment’; ‘nude cuba stockings salmospotspeckled’; ‘fancyfastened, free to undo’ knickerbockers; ‘hayrope garters’; and

a 'Lapsummer skirt' (*FW* 208.10; 208.11; 208.12; 208.16; 208.19; 199.13). She likes iridescent styles ('she sported a galligo shimmy of hazevaipar tinto', *FW* 208.13) and wears 'teddybearlined' (fur) items (*FW* 208.17). Her cosmetic construction of femininity is also described at great length:

First she let her hair fal and down it flussed to her feet its teviots winding coils. Then, mothernaked, she sampood herself with galawater and fraguant pistania mud, wupper and lauar, from crown to sole. Next she greesed the groove of her keel, warthes and wears and mole and itcher, with antifouling butterscatch and turfentide and serpentthyme and with leafmould she ushered round prunella isles and eslats dun, quincecunct, allover her little mary. Peeld gold of waxwork her jellybelly and her grains of incense anguille bronze. And after that she wove a garland for her hair. She pleated it. She plaited it. Of meadowgrass and riverflags, the bulrush and waterweed, and of fallen griefs of weeping willow. Then she made her bracelets and her anklets and her armlets and a jetty amulet for necklace of clicking cobbles and pattering pebbles and rumbledown rubble, richmond and rehr, of Irish rhunerhinerstones and shellmarble bangles. That done, a dawk of smut to her airy ey, Annushka Lutetiavitch Pufflovah, and the lollipop cream to her lippeleens and the pick of the paintbox for her pommettes, from strawbirry reds to extra violates [...] She said she wouldn't be half her length away. Then, then, as soon as the lump his back was turned [...] Anna Livia, oysterface, forth of her bassein came. (*FW* 206.29-207.20).

In this description of her beauty procedure, Joyce painstakingly shows how ALP contrives her feminine appearance. Yet among such lavishly feminine elements are some conspicuously masculine aspects too: the washerwomen also note her 'damazon cheeks' (*FW* 199.13), suggesting a masculinized version of a woman; as she floats out to sea at the end of the novel she refers to herself as 'handsome, the wild Amazia' (*FW* 627.28). She is also spotted 'puffing her old dudheen' (*FW* 200.18; a dudeen is a short tobacco pipe, from the Irish dúidín; it also contains the word



‘dude’, but with a feminising, arguably belittling, suffix). ALP’s look includes ‘a ploughboy’s nailstudded clogs’ (my emphasis, *FW* 208.06) and in the final pages of the *Wake* she admits to having been a ‘princeable girl’ in her youth (*FW* 626.27) suggesting that her mixed-gender sartorial performance is not new to her (principal boys were usually played by young girls).

These extensive descriptions of her clothes and make up illustrate Joyce’s intellectual sympathy with the Rivierian conception of femininity as a masquerade. Unlike the university lecturer in Riviere’s case study, who managed to dress herself as a convincingly feminine female, ALP ‘fails’ this test of gender. Her look is mocked by those around her: ‘O gig goggle of giggleguels. I can’t tell you how!’; ‘Well for her she couldn’t see herself. [...] There was a koros of drouthdropping surfacemen, boomslanging and plugchewing, fruiteyeing and flowerfeeding, in contemplation of the fluctuation and the undification of her filimentation’ (*FW* 206.14; 208.34-209.03). At one point, the washerwomen remark that ‘Everyone that saw her said the dowce little delia looked a bit queer’ (*FW* 208.29); the final word perhaps suggests ALP’s homosexuality or it may be an allusion to Dietrich’s (‘delia’) cross-dressing. By bemusing her neighbours with the various contrasting elements of her outfit, ALP demonstrates her fluid identity, emphasizing the disparity between her masculine and feminine characteristics, just as Joyce had been watching Dietrich do on screen during the later 1920s, contemporaneously with when Riviere had been contemplating precisely the same issues. ALP’s ‘ems of embarras’ (*FW* 207.35) stand in marked contrast to Dietrich’s bold delight in playing with dress and indicate Joyce’s sensitivity towards (women’s) anxieties about the relationship between gender and fashion in this period and cultural context. ALP gets some of her style tips from a magazine Joyce satirically names ‘the Fashion Display’ (*FW* 206.113) yet she appears to subvert the ostensible ‘rules’ of fashion and shows her mixed gender identity in a mode consistent with a contemporaneous, glamorous and infamous star.

The mannish lesbian and her masculine dress, characterized in Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), is perhaps the most famous example of the relationship between gender play and fashion in the late 1920s. While this novel now has a reputation for being the prime

instance of this, we should recognize, as this essay has attempted to show, that the relationship between gender performances and clothes was of interest to more cultural figures beyond Hall, including fellow novelist Joyce, film star Dietrich and psychoanalyst Riviere. There is no possibility of influence: as much as Joyce admired Dietrich's film, for example, he had already published and gone on to revise further the *Wake* episode in question. Despite this, the emergence of similar conceptualizations of gender and its (sartorial) performativity across these three disciplines in such a short period is striking.

[2,331 words; 2,481 with endnotes]

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<sup>1</sup> In her biography of Nora Joyce, as she later became, Brenda Maddox provides a subtly different translation of Dietrich's comment: 'Then, monsieur, you saw me at my best' (Maddox 1988: 429).

<sup>2</sup> Future references will be from this edition, in parentheses in the text, indicating page and line number.

<sup>3</sup> *Finnegans Wake* 1.8 is considered the river chapter of the text, making reference to rivers and waterways around the world (thus 'opening up' the text beyond the English language and making the *Wake* an internationally comprehensible work, as readers identify their native rivers). It is a neat fluke that Riviere had the surname she did and that her ideas about masquerade find expression in this chapter: it recalls Guy Davenport's comment that 'the world was invented and arranged for James Joyce's convenience' (John Taggart, 'Sound and Vision', in Mark Scroggins, *Intricate Thicket: Reading Late Modernist Poetries* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2015), p.228).